United Nations A/C.3/57/SR.39

General Assembly
Fifty-seventh session

Official Records

Distr.: General
6 July 2005
English
Original: French

Third Committee

Summary record of the 39th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 7 November 2002, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Wenaweser ..... (Liechtenstein)
later: Mr. Morikawa (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Japan)

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02-67965 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 104: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (A/57/3, A/57/12 and A/57/324)

1. **Mr. Lubbers** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) said that since December 2001 the number of refugees around the world had declined significantly. Many refugees had been able to return to their homes in Afghanistan, Eritrea and Sierra Leone; the end of the conflicts in Angola, Timor-Leste and Sri Lanka suggested that similar movements might be expected there; and in South-Eastern Europe, UNHCR continued to phase out its activities. Because of those developments, increasing emphasis was being placed on rehabilitation and reconstruction, which were among the lasting solutions given high priority by UNHCR.

2. However, there continued to be problems. The turmoil in Liberia had resulted in new refugee flows, the recent events in Côte d'Ivoire were causing concern, and there were continuing problems in Colombia and the Caucuses. UNHCR was working closely with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), other United Nations agencies, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in meeting those challenges.

3. In West Africa, steps had been taken to protect refugee women and children from the threat of sexual exploitation and abuse and, in accordance with the recommendations of the Inter-Agency Steering Committee, a code of conduct for staff had been drawn up.

4. Following the events of 11 September, a number of States had strengthened measures to combat illegal immigration and the misuse of asylum, and UNHCR did not object to that process. However, because the indiscriminate application of such measures had sometimes barred access to asylum procedures and led to instances of refoulement, steps should be taken to ensure that refugees continued to be given access to procedures that were both fair and rapid, without the risk of being sent back to face persecution, imprisonment, torture, or death.

5. Among the other problems that needed to be addressed were the detention of asylum-seekers, which was on the increase, and their demonization by parts of the media and a number of political leaders, especially during electoral campaigns.

6. In its efforts to find lasting solutions to the problems of refugees, UNHCR had been working with several partners to formulate a number of participatory approaches.

7. With respect to post-conflict solutions, UNHCR proposed an integrated approach focusing on four key principles: repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Programmes were currently being implemented according to that model in Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, in close partnership with the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the World Food Programme (WFP). Those programmes relied on the active participation of United Nations country teams, as well as bilateral and multilateral donors.

8. With regard to long-term refugees, UNHCR was proposing the development-through-local-integration approach. Rather than treating refugees merely as a burden, host countries and the international community should see them as agents for development. Since most host countries were poor, donors should channel their aid to the areas populated by refugees, where both refugees and local populations could benefit from it.

9. The search for long-term solutions to the refugee problem should be based on new partnerships. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) specifically referred to the question of refugees and the need to find durable solutions, on the ground that the development of Africa would be impossible unless the refugee problem was resolved. Even though they mentioned the problem of poverty, the development goals set out in the Millennium Declaration made no specific reference to refugees. Yet, the international community had a duty to focus on that population category, which had certain specific needs.

10. The process of global consultation on the international protection of refugees had resulted in the Agenda for Protection, which must serve as a practical guide, not just for UNHCR, but also for Governments, non-governmental organizations, and other partners. While it remained of central importance, the 1951 Refugee Convention was no longer enough: hence the

"Convention Plus" initiative, which should lead to the adoption of multilateral agreements facilitating efforts to deal with the problem of refugees. Those new agreements should complement the Convention and provide a multilateral framework for the protection of refugees and the search for durable solutions, especially in countries of origin. They would focus primarily on secondary movements of refugees, massive outflows, and post-conflict resettlement, reintegration and reconstruction, and they would help define the respective roles and responsibilities of countries of origin, transit, and final destination.

11. In order to give UNHCR the means with which to carry out its mandate as well as possible, the "UNHCR 2004" process had been launched. It was specifically aimed at strengthening UNHCR as a multilateral institution.

12. To deal with the globalization of the refugee problem, the structure of UNHCR must be revised so that all regions would take part in the search for solutions.

13. In order to respond effectively to the demands of the international community, UNHCR must have a broader financial basis. While the UNHCR statute called for the funding of its administrative expenditure to be borne by the regular budget of the United Nations and for its operations to be covered by voluntary contributions, the reality had been quite different. UNHCR currently received just 20 million dollars from the Organization's regular budget.

14. The "UNHCR 2004" process had also highlighted the need to address the general question of international migration in a comprehensive and concerted manner. UNHCR was therefore endeavouring to strengthen cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) in order to deal more effectively with such matters.

15. While persecution and conflict produced refugees, unresolved refugee problems could themselves give rise to conflict and instability. Protecting refugees and searching for durable solutions were not just a humanitarian imperative; they also contributed to international peace and security.

16. **Ms. Kapalata** (United Republic of Tanzania) emphasized the importance her Government attached to the question of refugees in its development programme and at the same time supported the mandate of the High Commissioner. While development through local integration of refugees was a positive initiative, it was only realistic where the number of refugees was limited. That was far from the case in the United Republic of Tanzania, where there were over 600,000 refugees, including 500,000 under the responsibility of UNHCR. Local integration was therefore regarded with some apprehension, and it was considered that one must take into consideration the number and kind of refugees, along with the scope of the assistance that UNHCR and the international community provided to the Government of the host country. As for durable solutions, in the light of its lack of resources, her Government felt that priority should be given to voluntary repatriation and called upon the international community to offer broader support for efforts along those lines.

17. **Mr. Hussain** (Pakistan) welcomed the progress made thanks to UNHCR initiatives, in spite of the financial constraints and the growing number of refugees. He drew attention especially to "Actions 1, 2 and 3", the setting of priorities and the holding of the Global Consultations on International Protection prior to the Ministerial Meeting in 2001, during which Governments were able to reinforce their commitment to the 1951 Refugee Convention and to adopt the Agenda for Protection. While it supported the organization of a forum as planned by the High Commissioner, his delegation considered that the experts' very useful work should not overshadow the importance of Government participation, as it was for Governments alone to make decisions about the future.

18. The local integration initiative was a major project, but on that subject his delegation shared the view of the Tanzanian delegation. The host country's capacity and the number of refugees to be hosted — the material obstacles to such local integration — must both be taken into account. Pakistan favoured voluntary repatriation but was willing to study the other solutions put forward by the High Commissioner, in particular in respect of resettlement. The Ministerial Meeting of 2001 had established that the number of countries likely to accept refugees for resettlement had increased from 10 to 23, a significant jump. Pakistan asked UNHCR to study existing possibilities in the countries concerned.

19. His Government was aware of the financial difficulties facing UNHRC, which would no doubt

impede the High Commissioner from fulfilling his mandate. It therefore associated itself with the appeal to donors for more generous contributions.

20. As the UNHCR 2004 process introduced by the Executive Committee called for all the parties concerned to show indulgence and flexibility, his delegation assured the High Commissioner of its support.

21. The Government was very concerned about Afghan refugees in Pakistan. While UNHCR action had enabled more than 1.5 million of them to be repatriated, there were still two million awaiting a solution, mainly in camps. He asked what the High Commissioner intended to do to repatriate those refugees, given that the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan was still difficult owing to current military operations.

22. **Ms. Ahmed** (Sudan) reaffirmed the support of her Government for the work of the High Commissioner and drew attention to two matters of concern: first, whether action was being taken to alleviate the burden on host States of refugees living outside camps, a problem addressed by two draft resolutions submitted under the current agenda item; and secondly, in view of the financial difficulties hindering the fulfilment of the High Commissioner's mandate, whether any new initiatives were under consideration to secure additional resources. She supported the appeal made to the donor community.

23. **Ms. Rodsmoen** (Norway) said that UNHCR, as a body, did not assign sufficient importance to women refugees and to gender-specific issues. The five commitments to refugee women, outlined in the UNHCR report (A/57/12), were a commendable initiative, but they should be reflected more broadly at the level of UNHCR as a whole and in its programmes. Norway proposed establishing a high-level post in the administration whose incumbent would be responsible for overseeing the fulfilment of that goal, and asked whether the High Commissioner would agree to that proposal.

24. **Mr. Lubbers** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), replying to comments by the Tanzanian delegation, briefly recalled the three options that were available to refugees, depending on the circumstances. Voluntary repatriation took first place given the fact that refugees were a burden for many countries; however, that was based on the assumption that peace and order would return in the country of origin of those concerned. UNHCR was undertaking very active measures in that regard, in Burundi and Rwanda, for example. The second solution consisted in promoting self-reliance among refugees, especially those living outside the camps. In that connection, he believed that the commitments undertaken by the rich countries during the Monterrey Conference should include not only official development assistance, but also specific assistance for countries welcoming refugees: refugees should not be considered only as an economic burden, for they could also be agents of development. That was the case, for example, in Zambia, where the refugees were more integrated with the population than elsewhere. The concerns stemming from the financial situation of UNHCR were linked not so much to the organization itself as to the persons for whom it was responsible and to the solutions to their problems. Official development assistance must be increased so as to further voluntary repatriation, reconstruction and reintegration. Each dollar or euro invested in that undertaking helped to encourage refugee participation in the development process. It was very wrong to believe that development activities should precede repatriation, for refugees wanted above all to return to their countries of origin and to be given an opportunity. Lastly, the third solution was resettlement when the situation in the country of origin prohibited any return plan. He was therefore appealing for a contravention of the humanitarian tradition of sharing not only human, but also financial, responsibilities.

25. For the information of the delegation of Pakistan, he stated that it was not just a question of abiding by the 1951 Refugee Convention; just as important were an increase in official development assistance and the strengthening of cooperation between countries in order to find an answer to the refugee problem. The UNHCR Executive Committee would study those issues during the forthcoming consultations in the framework of the "UNHCR 2004" process.

26. With regard to Afghan refugees in Afghanistan, UNHCR was sparing no effort to manage the situation, especially in facilitating the return of Pashtuns and in resolving the problems related to refugee camps emphasized by the delegation of Pakistan.

27. Without challenging the role of experts, he agreed that the envisaged "Forum" must be based primarily on the will of countries. Multilateral action must indeed

be taken and official development assistance must be increased. That depended on States alone and was at the basis of the "Convention Plus" approach.

28. To the question posed by the Sudanese delegation, he replied that the international community must be persuaded to increase its assistance so as to promote peace, security and development, and emphasized the strategic value of solving the refugee issue. He also stressed the importance of approaches articulated around the "4 Rs", and of development through local integration, which aimed at broadening financial support from countries — especially the richest ones — for UNHCR. He noted in passing that the per capita contribution of the United States, for example, was under one dollar. It was also essential to encourage the building of partnerships between countries, especially countries from the Muslim world, some of which were very affluent and could help to broaden the basis of funding for UNHCR.

29. After pointing out that Norway was one of the largest donors, he added that UNHCR devoted itself not only to protecting women, but also to finding solutions to their problems. The HIV/AIDS pandemic was one of its major concerns, and it should be noted that the infection rates in refugee camps in Africa were lower than those recorded outside. That was thanks to the work on the ground resulting in better dissemination of information, especially as taboos were less omnipresent in the camps. Women played a major role, they should be protected and their skills should be utilized to the maximum extent. He announced that he would be visiting Colombia very soon. The situation there was rendered very difficult by the presence of a large number of displaced persons in the interior of the country. He intended to invite women to help solve those problems by refusing to leave the country to the politicians and by affirming their own power.

30. He approved the idea of establishing a high-level post and intended to consult with the Executive Director of UNICEF on the modalities of cooperation between UNHCR and UNICEF. Emphasizing the importance of concrete action in order to resolve the refugee question, he assured the Norwegian delegation that its proposal would be discussed during those consultations.

31. **Mr. Fusano** (Japan), after expressing his country's interest in energizing the partnership between UNHCR and other organizations, particularly UNICEF, in connection with the resettlement of returnees, asked the High Commissioner whether he intended to build new partnerships with other bodies.

32. **Mr. Ouédraogo** (Burkina Faso) described the situation in Côte d'Ivoire, where many foreigners were preparing to return to their countries of origin. She asked the High Commissioner to clarify the role UNHCR would play in security arrangements for returnees and in their resettlement. As to the financial situation of UNHCR, she pointed out that her delegation was joining in the appeal that the High Commissioner had launched to the international community. She assured him that her country would support the resolution recommending the extension of his mandate.

33. **Ms. Mi Nguyen** (Canada), after mentioning the contacts between UNHCR and UNICEF regarding the special status of refugee women and children, and making it clear that the gap between principles and their application on the ground needed to be bridged, asked the High Commissioner to indicate how he envisaged the participation of partners and Member States in the consultation process that had been announced, and what he was recommending in order to reinforce the partnership between the humanitarian, political and military branches of the United Nations system in emergency situations.

34. **Ms. Joyce** (South Africa) said that her delegation had taken note of the budgetary cutbacks announced for UNHCR and of the High Commissioner's visits to Africa, a region which provided shelter for almost 30 per cent of the world's refugees. South Africa was very interested in cooperating with UNHCR, particularly in the context of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Her Government supported the High Commissioner in his desire to bridge the gap between humanitarian relief and development assistance, which was entirely in line with the objectives of NEPAD. In particular, her Government supported the partnership initiatives undertaken by UNHCR and other development bodies in Zambia, Eritrea and Sierra Leone, for example, which benefited the local population as much as refugees. It was in the interest both of host countries and of the international community to promote self-reliance among refugees. Her delegation was convinced that refugees, having managed to overcome extreme difficulties, had acquired valuable experience which should be turned to account.

35. She pointed out that while it was in the field that the work on behalf of refugees was done, it was in Geneva and New York that the decisions were made and the resolutions adopted. Regarding the Agenda for Protection and the meeting of experts announced in the High Commissioner's report (A/57/12), South Africa shared the concern of certain countries facing the prospect of integrating several million refugees, particularly the poorest countries, which lacked the wherewithal to assimilate refugees. It was therefore requesting the High Commissioner to start discussions with the African countries in an efforts to find lasting solutions, which could not be imposed upon the host countries.

36. **Mr. Konfourou** (Mali) referred to the rapes and other inhuman treatment inflicted upon refugees, and to the code of conduct, based on a policy of "zero tolerance", announced to remedy the situation. He requested the High Commissioner to provide details of the measures aimed at preventing such practices, which damaged the image of UNHCR.

37. Regarding the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, he said that his country had welcomed as brothers 5,000 Ivorian refugees. He praised UNHCR for rapidly taking charge of that population in distress, and invited it to redouble its efforts to help not only the refugees themselves but also the host country. Mindful of the peace negotiations under way in Côte d'Ivoire, his delegation hoped that UNHCR was already thinking about implementing in Côte d'Ivoire its approach structured around the "4 Rs" — Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction. It wanted to know what assistance UNHCR intended to provide to populations displaced inside the border of Côte d'Ivoire.

38. **Mr. Simancas Gutiérrez** (Mexico) asked the High Commissioner to clarify further the measures applied by UNHCR and other institutions and programmes to prevent the exploitation of refugees sexually or otherwise. The High Commissioner should also describe how he planned to proceed in order to have the same code of conduct adopted by other organizations and non-UNHCR personnel involved in activities on the ground.

39. **Mr. Lubbers** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to Japan, said that assistance to refugees required an integrated approach involving many participants. He hoped that each one would play its role and expressed his readiness to ensure coordination of the process. He was relying on the large non-governmental organizations, which often had far greater financial means than UNHCR, to take on a greater share of the burden. At the same time, there was no denying the importance of the activities undertaken on the ground by the small non-governmental organizations.

40. In answer to Burkina Faso and Mail regarding the situation in Côte d'Ivoire, he said that UNHCR was present on the ground and was doing everything in its power to try and find a solution to the conflict. However, he could not solve all the problems single-handed. As matters stood, the solution remained essentially of a political nature, and he was already attempting, together with neighbouring countries, to resolve the crisis.

41. In response to the questions put by the Canadian delegation, he confirmed that he had excellent working relations with each of the three branches of the United Nations system — humanitarian, political and military. However, as UNHCR was searching for lasting solutions, it was essential to promote closer coordination between the activities of the various players, and to move issues beyond the discussion stage and take action according to a global and integrated approach. He deplored the fact that refugees were still not systematically taken into account in national development programmes. Development assistance should be more focused on the search for solutions to refugee problems, and efforts should be made to introduce special optional multilateral agreements.

42. In response to the representative of South Africa, he welcomed the efforts made by the President of that country, in the context of NEPAD. He also paid tribute to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his appeals to States requesting they provide more generous support to his Office, in the context of Africa in particular. It was not enough to request greater efforts from African countries; the rich countries must also show more generosity. The solution was a simple question of financial resources.

43. With regard to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which further weakened societies and populations already made vulnerable by drought and poverty, he stressed the need to provide refugees with an opportunity to become productive and by so doing strengthening the social structures broken down by the epidemic.

44. In reply to the representative of Mexico, he pointed out that a comprehensive review had contradicted media stories and revealed that no United Nations staff member had been involved in the incidents in question. In order for the Code of Conduct developed with a view to preventing such behaviour from being truly effective, non-governmental organizations and other partners of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the field must also implement that Code of Conduct. The increased poverty in Africa was adding to the fragility of people and making them even more vulnerable to exploitation. Reduction of his Office's resources could exacerbate that situation. His Office must therefore be provided with appropriate means to assist the refugees and maintain its presence in the camps. The principle of zero tolerance must be strictly applied to non-governmental partners.

45. **Mr. Yaqob** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) welcomed in particular the efforts undertaken by UNHCR to assist refugees in Africa and wondered how his Office distinguished between refugees and migrants.

46. *Mr. Morikawa (Japan), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

47. **Mr. Redai** (Ethiopia), although welcoming the 4R initiative launched by the High Commissioner, agreed with the Tanzanian representative with regard to local integration, a concept which he would like to see better defined. Such integration could have major consequences for Ethiopia and should not be undertaken lightly. Moreover, it was only possible with the consent of the host country.

48. He wondered whether the financing of development through local integration would have a negative effect on financing for development in general, given the decrease in funding for public development assistance. He asked what the international community could do to remedy the underlying causes of the problem rather than limiting itself to dealing with the fate of refugees.

49. **Mr. Simbolon** (Indonesia) thanked the High Commissioner for his unflagging efforts to find durable solutions to the problem of refugees throughout the world and welcomed in particular his efforts in East Timor. Recalling the joint world appeal launched by the United Nations and his Government in 2001 to raise funds and the efforts aimed at settling the problem of refugees from East Timor through repatriation on a free-consent basis as well as local reintegration, he called on the international community to pledge or increase its contributions in that regard.

50. **Mr. Osman** (Algeria), referring to paragraph 97 of the UNHCR report (A/57/12), welcomed the High Commissioner's efforts on behalf of refugees in North Africa and assured him of his country's cooperation in that regard. However, with regard to the parenthesis which read "Government figures", following the estimated number of Saharawi refugees, he wondered whether those figures had in fact been provided by his Government and whether that implied that the Office of the High Commissioner had no other statistics on Saharawi refugees. Furthermore, situating Tindouf, a city in southwestern Algeria, in the Western Sahara region could lead to confusion, since the name "Western Sahara" referred geographically to a territory to the west of Algeria which was the subject of United Nations decolonization efforts. He requested that the High Commissioner should take due note of his remarks when drafting any future reports.

51. **Mr. Lubbers** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), in response to the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, said it was not easy to distinguish refugees from economic migrants. The term "refugee" applied to individuals who had fled, or who had good reason to fear, violence and persecution. However, countries also accepted individuals who had left their countries for humanitarian reasons, in other words, because they had been the victims of various forms of discrimination. He pointed out that economic migrants often identified themselves as asylum-seekers. A better system was therefore needed to manage migrations which would allow for the establishment of clear criteria defining the various categories. It was true that the current situation was not clear, which left the way open for an entire industry of human trafficking and exploitation of the most vulnerable. He recalled that in his opening statement he had said that his Office was working with IOM and ILO in order to improve the situation.

52. In response to the representative of Ethiopia, he said that States had the sovereign right to limit local integration but that providing opportunities for refugees could have very positive results. That was why he had stressed the development assistance issue. In his opinion, there was no reason for development assistance in general and development assistance for refugees to be in competition because he believed that

any investment aimed at making refugees a productive element in society benefited both the refugees and society, as would become increasingly obvious to development bodies. Even if priority was given to repatriation based on free consent, a development assistance element would have to be included.

53. Although UNHCR had been established 50 years earlier to protect refugees and find a solution to their plight through repatriation or integration, there was now evident reluctance on the part of the rich countries — and others as well — to take in refugees. The rich countries must be asked to make substantial financial contributions to give refugees a new start in life, preferably in their countries of origin, which could then benefit from development assistance, or in neighbouring countries, which would then be entitled to generous development assistance, or even through appropriate resettlement programmes.

54. He thanked the Indonesian delegation for its kind words and pointed out that, regarding the East Timorese refugees, his Office might shortly activate the cessation clause. It supported the appeal to the international community to give its financial support to the undertaking.

55. Replying to a question from the representative of Algeria, he said that the situation regarding the number of Saharawi refugees was fuzzy; but what was really important was to find a solution, which called for all parties to undertake confidence-building measures in order to forge a path towards a political solution. The purpose of UNHCR was not to coordinate assistance, but to find solutions.

56. **Mr. Dhakal** (Nepal) supported the 4R approach proposed by UNHCR and thanked the High Commissioner for his explanation of the development-through-local-integration option, which deserved detailed case-by-case consideration.

57. With reference to paragraph 72 of the report (A/57/12), in which the High Commissioner referred to the 110,000 Bhutanese residing in Nepal, his country was doing, and would continue to do, everything in its power to find a solution through bilateral negotiations for that group of refugees living in the east of the country.

58. He also thanked UNHCR and the donor bodies for their humanitarian assistance to Nepal.

59. **Mr. Kadiri** (Morocco) said that his country had always expressed reservations about the reliability of statistics communicated to UNHCR on Saharawi refugees in camps. Morocco would like refugees originating in provinces of Morocco to return home and had always declared its readiness to implement confidence-building measures; accordingly, it was not Morocco's fault if such measures were not adopted.

60. **Mr. Lubbers** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that Morocco and Nepal were in a similar situation of hosting long-term refugees. In the case of Nepal, he was pleased to learn that bilateral negotiations were under way to find a solution. Where the Saharawi refugees were concerned, he was less interested in the exact number of refugees than in a solution to their problems. He assured both countries that UNHCR was at their disposal to facilitate negotiations. However, not being responsible for the impasse, it could only hope that a more positive spirit would prevail so that a solution could be found before UNHCR was obliged to cut short its operations.

61. **Mr. Dewey** (United States of America) commended UNHCR for its hard work, an excellent example of which was its outstanding action in Afghanistan. Assistance with the repatriation of thousands of refugees was beyond doubt essential for the start-up and success of the country's reconstruction. While remarkable progress had been made, as he himself had witnessed during two recent visits, that progress was still fragile and required the international community to hold firm in its support to the country. Insecurity continued to impede the advancement of civil society and humanitarian activities in Afghanistan. Strengthening security meant coordinated building of the army, the police and the rule of law and, above all, the building of humanitarian structures and programmes. Donor support for the process must continue, especially for reconstruction and humanitarian needs, for as long as it took.

62. Finding permanent solutions was the ultimate objective. Expressing appreciation to UNHCR for initiatives to facilitate voluntary repatriation (for example, in Angola, Eritrea, Somalia and Sierra Leone) and for host countries' efforts to promote local integration, his delegation reiterated its preference for refugee resettlement, which was a tool of protection and an incentive to share responsibility.

63. For millions of refugees, the situation prevailing in their countries of origin dashed any hopes of a solution. As the High Commissioner had pointed out, unless a solution was found for refugees, the prospects for peace and development would be limited, in Africa and elsewhere.

64. Faced with new flows of refugees in many African countries, UNHCR must once more raise resources. In that regard, the United States was concerned by the inadequate support of certain countries and regional organizations and the fact that UNHCR must cut back even its inadequate resource-based support projections. Refugee protection and assistance activities were indivisible, which was why the United States placed nearly all its refugee funding through UNHCR, rather than through several agencies with related activities. His Government had contributed over $255 million to UNHCR in 2002, including more than $100 million for programmes in Africa.

65. He appealed for support for a multilateral system, as it was only by means of a concerted and coordinated approach, with each Member State fulfilling its obligations, that they could maximize taxpayers' money, avoid any duplication of efforts and work together as true partners for the benefit of refugees. He took special note of the generosity of refugee-hosting countries that also provided funding.

66. As the protection of refugees was one of the objectives of UNHCR, he commended the organization for the steps it had taken in response to allegations of sexual exploitation on the part of its staff. The Office's protection mandate was not just a legal mandate, but also a means to prevent physical and psychological harm to those under its care. UNHCR could not provide adequate protection without the support of the international community. The Agenda for Protection provided a good road map for guiding UNHCR, as well as States and other protection partners, with which the United States was looking forward to working in order to prioritize and implement the objectives of the Agenda. One of those objectives was refugee registration, which was the essential precursor to refugee resettlement. The United States looked forward to working with UNHCR and other Member States towards the implementation of a standardized registration system.

67. He highlighted the importance of coordination. The programme secretariat structure in Afghanistan was a model for post-conflict coordination, cooperation, capacity-building and transition. Host government ministries, international and non-governmental organizations, donor States and the World Bank were working together for lasting stability and progress. In other situations, that structure could be used as a model.

68. He assured the High Commissioner that his Government supported his efforts, especially with regard to mobilizing donors.

69. **Mr. Moesby** (Denmark), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the other associated countries and Iceland, said that refugees represented one of the most pressing issues facing the international community. It was not only a major humanitarian issue, but also an issue of regional stability, insofar as protracted refugee crises could result in cross-border tension or other negative consequences. In carrying out its activities, UNHCR needed to adapt to changing circumstances without sacrificing respect for principle.

70. The European Union intended to take an active part in the follow-up to the Agenda for Protection, which was the outcome of the global consultation process launched by UNHCR in 2000, and believed that it was necessary to establish a clear set of priorities to make the Agenda as effective as possible.

71. The European Union noted with great interest the High Commissioner's initiatives launched at the latest meeting of the Executive Committee, including the creation of a forum and the Convention Plus strategy. Under that strategy, new agreements would be established to supplement the 1951 Convention and its Protocol and form part of a multilateral framework for protecting refugees and achieving durable solutions, primarily in the regions of origin and with respect to burden-sharing and responsibility-sharing. The importance of burden-sharing and responsibility-sharing had been reflected in the debate in the Executive Committee in 2002 and the European Union Presidency would focus further on that issue at the European Council meeting in Copenhagen in December 2002.

72. The development of effective systems of refugee registration and documentation, including biometric features, was necessary to improve protection and assistance. The European Union was pleased to note

that priority would be given to the establishment of such a system.

73. To enable refugees to lead meaningful and dignified lives and to make positive contributions to their host countries, it was necessary to focus on self-reliance.

74. The European Union welcomed the efforts of the High Commissioner to seek sustainable solutions. That implied an increased emphasis on transitional needs in post-conflict and protracted refugee situations. In particular, more should be done to secure the sustainability of the return and reintegration of refugees in their home countries. While the large-scale refugee return to Afghanistan was a success, it was important to step up activities in the area of rehabilitation and reconstruction. The integration of refugees in their host communities should also be supported.

75. It was also necessary to address root causes more vigorously by means of conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peace-building and confidence-building. Solutions to refugee crises often lay in a comprehensive approach to conflict situations, including regional approaches.

76. The European Union welcomed the strengthening of the cooperation between UNHCR, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme. It also welcomed the New Partnership for Africa's Development, which aimed to bring peace, stability and prosperity to the continent by means of sustainable development. The European Union believed that it was necessary to include refugees and returnees in overall development plans.

77. About 80 per cent of the world's uprooted people were women and children. Recent allegations of sexual abuse in refugee camps in West Africa were a reminder that women and children had an enhanced need for protection. UNHCR had taken steps to initiate preventive action, including the elaboration of a code of conduct.

78. Recalling the problem of internally displaced persons, he noted that the international community was not always able to gain access to populations whose need of protection and assistance was greatest. Apart from their being subjected to insecurity and persecution, they were deprived of the most basic necessities. Primary responsibility for such populations rested with Governments. However, when Governments lacked either the resources or adequate means to provide the required assistance and protection, it was incumbent upon them to invoke the support of international organizations and to ensure that humanitarian organizations had full access to all displaced persons.

79. The European Union welcomed the establishment of a special unit for internally displaced persons within the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the implementation of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement developed by the Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons. The basis for the work of the United Nations system was a collaborative approach, and UNHCR's efforts to promote transparency were highly appreciated.

80. UNHCR's continued struggle with financial difficulties threatened to limit its activities. He recognized the importance of the High Commissioner's efforts to increase the donor base, to achieve equitable burden-sharing and to attract additional resources, including complementary funding. The European Union as a whole was by far the largest contributor to UNHCR.

81. Acknowledging that the magnitude of the task demanded well-coordinated collaboration, he welcomed continued efforts by UNHCR to strengthen cooperation with all its partners. Given the European Commission's position as a major stakeholder in UNHCR and the European Community's experience in the area of asylum, the European Union regretted that the Executive Committee had been unable to reach a consensus on according an enhanced status to the European Commission. He hoped that an agreement would soon be reached.

82. It was clear that the High Commissioner placed considerable emphasis on a stronger role for UNHCR as a multilateral organization. The High Commissioner had indicated his intention to request the General Assembly to approve the completion of work begun to define the overall direction of UNHCR's future activities, in particular in relation to governance, funding and the position of UNHCR in the United Nations system.

83. In closing, he repeated his call to countries that had not yet done so to accede to the 1951 Convention and its 1997 Protocol.

84. **Mr. Xie** Bohua (China) said that the most significant development of 2002, in terms of the situation of refugees in the world, was the return to Afghanistan of 2 million Afghan refugees and displaced persons. His delegation was most appreciative of the efforts made by all who had contributed to their return, and trusted that the Afghan refugee problem would soon be resolved.

85. In spite of the noticeable drop in the number of refugees within the scope of UNHCR's activity, 19.8 million still remained. The international community must not only assist host countries; it must also tackle the root causes of the problem by maintaining peace and stability and preventing the creation of new and large flows of refugees and displaced persons. In that connection, his Government actively supported the New Partnership for Africa's Development initiated by African States, and was prepared to contribute to its implementation.

86. His delegation welcomed the Agenda for Protection — one outcome of the Global Consultations on International Protection — and the "Convention Plus" proposal, the purpose of which was to complement the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. His delegation was ready to participate actively in consultations with interested parties in a common search for solutions.

87. **Mr. Simancas Gutiérrez** (Mexico) said that Mexico, a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, wholeheartedly endorsed the goals and principles set forth in those instruments.

88. His delegation considered it necessary to seek lasting solutions that were compatible with the specific needs of refugees, including voluntary repatriation and the full integration of refugees into host countries. It therefore welcomed the noticeable reduction in the number of refugees, as reported by the High Commissioner at the fifty-third session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of UNHCR. That development was proof that lasting solutions had been put in place. His delegation also believed that, with the proper assistance, refugees could contribute significantly to the development of host countries, and prepare to return to their countries of origin when the time was right.

89. While measures should be taken to prevent abuse of the right of asylum, in particular by criminal or terrorist organizations, care should be exercised to protect the rights of refugees and to avoid infringing upon the principle of asylum.

90. The Agenda for Protection should provide a clear reaffirmation of principles for the special protection needed by refugees. Those principles could not be compromised, certainly not on the pretext, for example, of combating human trafficking. The Agenda should be based on respect for human rights, avoid discrimination, racism, and xenophobia, combat the harmful prejudices suffered by refugees, and include provisions for advancing the status of women. It should also envisage close cooperation on refugee protection with non-governmental organizations and with civil society as a whole.

91. For its part, Mexico had worked to implement durable solutions based on the aforementioned principles. Under its migration stabilization programme, for example, it had accorded naturalization, visitor or immigrant status to around 24,500 Guatemalans. Following an agreement reached with UNHCR, the Mexican Refugee Aid Commission had been responsible, since March 2002, for defining the status of refugees. In the light of its experiences thus far, the Government would in the future focus on the following areas: coordinating interventions with humanitarian aid agencies; strengthening administrative bodies responsible for refugees; and managing public policies relating to refugees.

92. Lastly, despite the encouraging progress made, his delegation remained concerned about the remaining difficulties, especially the reports of sexual abuse by humanitarian workers. Mexico hoped that the necessary measures would be taken following the review undertaken by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS).

93. **Archbishop Martino** (Observer for the Holy See) welcomed the fall in the number of refugees around the world, as mentioned in the UNHCR report (A/57/12). He was, however, concerned that many displaced persons continued to be confronted by closed borders, violence, or xenophobia.

94. The Catholic Church tried to serve the needs of thousands of displaced persons through a number of agencies, such as the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, Caritas Internationalis, Catholic Relief Services, and the Jesuit Refugee

Service. During 2001, in the United States alone, the Catholic Church had assisted 319,541 refugees and migrants, who had received help with settlement, family reunification, education, legal services, and language classes.

95. A word of support should also be given to those States that continued to struggle to meet the needs of incoming refugees and migrants.

96. Apart from refugees — who were the responsibility of UNHCR, Governments and non-governmental organizations — mention should also be made of the around 50 million displaced persons in the world. The Holy See called urgently upon States to recognize their responsibilities in that regard, in particular by guaranteeing that all displaced persons within their borders were provided with security and access to basic social services.

97. **Mr. Al-Hajeri** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, IFRC) said that IFRC, through its Network of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, had long worked together with UNHCR to bring assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers. Whereas the mandate of UNHCR was to protect refugees, that of IFRC was to meet the needs of those who were most vulnerable, regardless of their status. States must honour the obligations set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other instruments and ensure that migrants and displaced persons were provided with the necessary protection.

98. It was unfortunate that the present debate on the vulnerability of displaced persons had been obscured by the shifting of the international community's focus towards other problems, which concerned only a small number of people, such as people smuggling and illegal migration. IFRC was also concerned about those activities, but could not allow the blame to be attached to the victims, who were often driven by desperate circumstances and were in utmost need of protection.

99. Vulnerability did not end when refugees or migrants arrived in the destination State of their choice. Documented cases of xenophobia and intolerance had increased dramatically over the past 10 years, especially after the events of 11 September 2001. It was within that difficult context that IFRC was trying to carry out its activities.

100. IFRC had worked alongside the Office of the High Commissioner, Governments and non-governmental organizations to develop the Agenda for Protection, and welcomed its adoption. However, while acknowledging the need to uphold the 1951 Convention as the basis for refugee protection, IFRC would be concerned if a restriction on secondary movements had the potential to expose individuals to persecution in their country of first asylum.

101. IFRC would consider all those questions within the ongoing discussions with UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF and other organizations.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.